SUMMARY OF THE ACCREDITING AUTHORITY COMMITTEE MEETING OCTOBER 31, 2000

The Accrediting Authority Committee of the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC) met on Tuesday, October 31, 2000, at 1:30 p.m. Pacific Standard Time (PST) as part of the Sixth NELAC Interim Meeting in Las Vegas, NV. The meeting was led by its chair, Mr. John P. Anderson of the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, Division of Laboratories. A list of action items is given in Attachment A. A list of participants is given in Attachment B. *The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the issues contained on the committee's published agenda.*

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Anderson introduced himself, and the committee members introduced themselves to the audience. Mr. Owen Crankshaw reviewed the "ground rules" for the meeting. Mr. Anderson then provided an overview of the committee's agenda for the afternoon.

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Secondary Accrediting Authority Discussion

Mr. Anderson invited Ms. Judith Duncan, representing the Accrediting Authority Review Board (AARB), to address the meeting regarding the issue of granting secondary accrediting authority to states who do not wish to be primary accrediting authorities. The reasons for states not wanting to be primary accrediting authorities may include cost, economy of scale, regulatory roadblocks, etc. Changes in Chapter 6 may be necessary to accomplish this. Mr. Anderson requested any comments from the audience on this issue. Concerns raised included the details of laboratory accreditation under this new proposal, the benefits of secondary accreditation to the states, the mechanics of revocation of secondary accrediting authority, and the ability to provide laboratories with an accreditation equivalent to that granted by a primary accrediting authority. The proposed advantages included lower costs to those states, ability to support the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (NELAP) on a graduated basis, convenience to the states' laboratories, and broadening of the scope of NELAP throughout the country.

Laboratory Appeal Process Discussion

Mr. Anderson then asked Ms. Duncan to address the issue of the laboratory appeal process. The AARB was asked by NELAP Director Jeanne Hankins to look into the issues of a complaints process and an appeal process for complaints and other issues brought up by laboratories. The AARB suggested that laboratories first contact the NELAP Director for intervention, who would then request AARB to engage in a fact-finding process, including interviews of involved parties, and then make a recommendation back to the director. The discussion which followed suggested that the necessary requirements are already in Chapter 6 (Section 6.3.3.1 (f)). Ms. Duncan asserted that her proposal was for situations when the appeal process already in the NELAC requirements fails to reach resolution

between interested parties (the laboratory and the primary accrediting authority). Attendees generally agreed that the recommendations of Ms. Duncan have considerable merit, and need further discussion by the committee.

Mr. Anderson stated that the committee would take the requests of Ms. Duncan and the comments of the audience regarding these two issues to their upcoming discussion of these issues at their next committee meeting.

Uniformity of On-site Assessments

Mr. Anderson then initiated a discussion regarding the administration of the NELAP process for laboratory accreditation, especially regarding the issue of ensuring that the quality of laboratory accreditation is uniform throughout the system. During the earlier drafting of Chapter 6, this issue of a quality management process for observation of on-site assessments by accrediting authorities was addressed, but it has never been resolved in a manner which meets the financial limitations of the NELAP program and to address the concerns of many individuals in the NELAP community. Consequently, the Accrediting Authority Committee appointed a subcommittee to look into the evaluation of Accrediting Authorities' on-site assessments. The subcommittee is chaired by Mr. Louis Johnson, and includes Ms. Roxanne Robinson, Ms. Karen Varnado, and Mr. Scott Hoatson. Mr. Johnson then provided an overview of the subcommittee's progress and their recommendations to date.

Mr. Johnson introduced the issues which included the forms to be used, the number of assessors to be used, training of the assessors, and the process for oversight and evaluation. Four topics were recommended by the subcommittee for discussion:

1. Development of a questionnaire to be submitted to a broad cross section of the NELAP community to gather information about the nature of the concerns about uniformity of the laboratory accreditation process across the nation.
2. Qualifications and training requirements for evaluators and draft list of evaluators.
3. Format and content of reports of the evaluations (it was felt that requirements for report content would ensure evaluators reviewed the same types of documents, procedures, etc.).
4. On-site assessment requirements for applicant accrediting laboratories.

Mr. Anderson asked for input from the committee members and the audience. Committee members stated that they have been asking states and NELAC members for input regarding their participation in a quality management process, that this process is an International Standards Organization (ISO)/National Cooperation for Laboratory Accreditation (NACLA) requirement for accreditation programs, and that this is a crucial link in the NELAP process for accreditation to provide a complete, uniform, and harmonious program. It was also noted that this issue is particularly crucial to laboratories in a primary accrediting authority state who have less choice over the accrediting authority which grants them accreditation.

Attendees commented that, as representatives of states, laboratories, and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regions, uniformity is of concern to them also, and an important goal warranting the revision of Chapter 6. One attendee suggested the use of regional EPA representatives to conduct the evaluations. Another attendee who had conducted on-site laboratory assessments indicated that the laboratory assessors have uncovered myriad problems involving the intricacies of on-site assessments highlighting the need for more uniformity throughout the system, particularly regarding the interpretation of the NELAC Standard by laboratory assessors and accrediting authorities.

Another attendee pointed out the problems related to investigating the records of an assessment team, since the records are kept at the EPA, and suggested an evaluation of the record retention policy procedure for storage and retrieval of records related to on-site assessments. A lead assessor indicated that specific guidelines for laboratory assessors are not adequate, and that this leads to potential problems regarding uniformity. Another problem relates to the uneven caliber of assessor capability and experience, which is difficult to correct with assessment standards.

Mr. Anderson stated that the committee appreciated the input they had received, and would discuss these issues at their next meeting, and would hope to have a framework and/or specific proposals to present at NELAC 7.

ADJOURNMENT

There were no further open discussion items raised by the audience or committee members. Mr. Anderson thanked the audience for their participation, and adjourned the meeting at 4:00 p.m.

Attachment A

ACTION ITEMS
ACCREDITING AUTHORITY COMMITTEE MEETING
OCTOBER 31, 2000

Item No.	Action	Date to be Completed
1.	Develop questionnaire for determining main concerns about laboratory assessment uniformity issues	1/1/01
2.	Begin discussion of issues raised at committee meeting	12/15/00
3.	Develop conceptual proposal to address issues by NELAC 7	3/15/01

Attachment B

PARTICIPANTS
ACCREDITING AUTHORITY COMMITTEE MEETING
OCTOBER 31, 2000

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